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ABSTRACT

This Critical Issue Bibliography (CRIB) Sheet presents resources on college rankings publications, criticisms of rankings methodology, effects of the rankings on the public, and alternatives to the major rankings guides. The annotated bibliography lists 5 Internet resources and 17 other resources, all of which are in the ERIC database. (SLD)

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Critical Issue Bibliography (CRIB) Sheet:

College Rankings

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A Critical Issue Bibliography (CRIB) sheet is a selected bibliography on a topic of interest in the field of higher education. The majority of the literature cited in the bibliography is found in the ERIC Database, though some CRIB sheets also include other literature, such as selected Internet resources. CRIB sheets are updated annually.

Many of the issues discussed in one bibligraphy relate to another CRIB sheet topic. For example, the CRIB sheet on affirmative action is closely related to the CRIB sheet on creating a multicultural climate on campus. We have tried to note such connections in the bibliographies themselves; we encourage you not to see CRIB sheet topics as discrete and to explore several bibliographies on related topics.

This CRIB sheet was created in August, 2002.

Critical Issue Bibliography (CRIB) Sheet:
College Rankings

Many scholars argue that popular lists of our nation's colleges and universities ranked by quality are unreliable, misleading, and ultimately, invalid. However, every year, *U.S. News and World Report, The Princeton Review, Barron's*, and others continue to publish ranked lists of America's "best" colleges and universities. While many college and university officials criticize the validity of these rankings, others continue to submit data to publishers compiling these lists and trumpet the results favorable to their institutions. The following CRIB presents resources on college rankings publications, criticisms of rankings methodology, effects of the rankings on the public, and alternatives to the major rankings guides.

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Internet Resources

http://gateway.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankoversy.htm
Rankings Caution and Controversy: An extensive collection of a variety of college rankings sources compiled by the Education and Social Science Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It also contains a bibliography to literature that helps explain some of the pitfalls of college rankings and how to use ranking services in an appropriate manner.

http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/rankindex.htm
U.S. News and World Report 2002 "America's Best Colleges"
Includes rankings of national universities, national liberal arts colleges, regional universities, regional liberal arts colleges, schools ranked by major, best values rankings, explanations of their methodology, "why U.S. News ranks colleges," and a frequently asked questions section.

http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/rankindex.htm
U.S. News and World Report 2003 Graduate School Rankings
Includes rankings for business, law, medicine, engineering, education, health, library science, the arts, public affairs, and Ph.D. programs.

http://www.review.com/college/rankings.cfm
The Princeton Review, The Best 331 Colleges
This survey breaks down the "best" colleges by categories such as academics, administration, parties, politics, quality of life, extracurriculars, and more.

http://thecenter.ufl.edu/research2001.html
The Top American Research Universities (2001)

The Lombardi Program on Measuring University Performance, The Center.
This alternative to rankings in the national media offers an analysis and data set that rank research universities on nine institutional characteristics. The site includes a description of the methodology used.

Rankings

ED404960
Elfin, M., Ed. (1997). *America's Best Graduate Schools, 1997. Exclusive Rankings: The Latest Word on Admissions, Entrance Tests, and Job Prospects, Plus a Directory of Law, Business, Medical, Osteopathic Medical, and Engineering Schools.* South Burlington, VT: U.S. News & World Report Specialty Marketing.
This career planning guide to graduate school education in the United States ranks graduate study programs and offers prospective students guidance. In articles about schools, students, life on campus, fields of study, and job prospects the guide tries to present a comprehensive view of what the best graduate schools today offer their students. The first several pieces in this issue provide some pragmatic advice on student life, how to cope with computerized entrance exams, and paying for college. The remaining sections are loosely organized by field of study: graduate business and law schools; education and the teaching professions; medical schools, osteopathic and veterinary medicine, other health fields, and social work; engineering; and the arts. Articles cover job prospects , students' school experiences, and the ranking of specific schools and programs. The "Careers at a Glance" section provides a concise guide to what kinds of applicants graduate schools seek, tips on admissions and test requirements, and job and salary outlooks. Also included is an eight-page self-evaluation survey. The Directory section is a state-by-state listing of 800 graduate programs.

EJ541276
Best National Liberal Arts Colleges; Regional Universities; Regional Liberal Arts Colleges. (1996, September 16). *U.S. News & World Report; 121*, 11, 116-120.
Ranking of 160 best liberal arts colleges provides data on academic reputation, student selectivity, faculty resources, financial resources, retention, alumni giving, college entrance examination scores, freshmen's high school rank, acceptance and yield rates, student/faculty ratio, expenditures per student, class size, alumni giving, freshman retention, 1995 graduation rate, and predicted graduation rate. Regional universities and regional liberal arts colleges are also listed.

EJ541273
Best National Universities. (1996, September 16). *U.S. News & World Report; 121*, 11, 110-14.
A ranking of 229 universities in the United States provides survey information concerning academic reputation, student selectivity, faculty resources, financial resources, retention, alumni giving, college entrance examination scores, freshmen's high school rank, acceptance and yield rates, student/faculty ratio, expenditures per student, class size, freshman retention, 1995 graduation rate, and predicted graduation rate.

EJ530942

America's Best Colleges. (1996, September 16). *U.S. News and World Report; 121*, 11, 89-93,101-02,104-23.
Results of this magazine's annual rating of colleges and universities are reported in articles about rising college costs, the college selection process, the new honors programs, the top 25 national universities, attitudes of college seniors about security and success, the top 25 liberal arts colleges, top regional institutions, top business/engineering/arts programs, and trends in community college enrollments.

ED316154
Byrne, J. A., Ed., (1990). *Business Week's Guide to the Best Business Schools. Ranking American's Top B-Schools In-Depth Profile of the Best 40 MBA Programs*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
The guide to America's best business schools was based on surveys of students and corporate recruiters as well as interviews with students, recruiters, faculty members, and deans. In addition to the Top 20 schools, it names and profiles 20 other MBA (Master's in Business Administration) schools also judged to be excellent. Profiles of schools typically include information on recruiter and graduate rankings, enrollment, student composition, average Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) scores, average grade point average, application deadline, average starting pay. Also presented for each school is a narrative describing the school history, atmosphere, student attitudes and life styles, and quotes of graduates. Seven chapters have the following titles and topics: "Why Go for the MBA" (why it's crucial to go to a good school, and things to consider in school choice); "How To Get into an Elite (Business) B-school" (how to increase GMAT scores, the B-school essay, the interview, references, and financial aid); "Part-Time MBA Programs" (the quality problem with part-time programs and the executive MBA); "The Best B-Schools" (a guide to the rankings and what they mean); "The Top Twenty" (full school profiles); "The Runners-Up"; and "Accredited B-Schools...How to Size Them Up."

Critiques of Rankings

ED432176
Porter, S. R. (1999, March). *The Robustness of the "Graduation Rate Performance" Indicators Used in the "U.S. News and World Report" College Rankings*. Paper presented at the AIR-CASE conference.
This study examined the robustness of the "U.S. News and World Report" graduation rate performance indicator used in the magazine's college rankings. The graduation rate performance indicator is calculated as the difference between an institution's actual graduation rate and its predicted graduation rate, and is based on a linear regression equation controlling for student aptitude and institutional expenditures. Data were obtained for 198 of the 218 national universities used in the magazine's 1999 rankings. It was found that changes in the sample and variable definitions could cause the predicted graduation rate for an institution to fluctuate by plus or minus two percentage points. More refined model specifications reduced the number of institutions with extreme performance differences and could actually change the ranking of an

institution from under-performance to over-performance, or vice versa. The use of confidence intervals for predicted graduation rates revealed that only about 5 percent of the institutions in the study had predicted graduation rates that differed significantly from their actual graduation rates. (Contains 34 references).

EJ554159
Selingo, J. (1997, November 7). A Self-Published College Guide Goes Big-Time, and Educators Cry Foul. *Chronicle of Higher Education; 44*, 11, A45-A46.
The Gourman Report, a guide to colleges and universities self-published since 1967, has largely been ignored by educators because its methodology is unclear and of questionable validity. Now, backed by a major test-preparation company and published by a major publisher, critics are concerned that it will gain legitimacy. The newest edition ranks administrative areas alongside academic departments.

EJ541322
Geraghty, M. (1997, March 14). "U.S. News" Alters Its Rankings of Law Schools After Finding Numerous Errors. *Chronicle of Higher Education; 43*, 27, A38.
Mistakes made by "U.S. News and World Report" in calculating law school job placement rates have resulted in erroneous rankings of 33 of 50 top schools. For most schools, the revision resulted in movement of only a place or two, but two rankings changed significantly. Educators have long been critical of the rankings, citing a false precision in ranking institutions.

EJ568897
Machung, A. (1998, July/August). Playing the Rankings Game. *Change; 30*, 4, 12-16.
The "U.S. News and World Report" rankings of colleges do not affect institutions equally; the schools impacted most are those that have the most to lose because they benefit from, even rely on, the rankings for prestige and visibility. The magazine relies on the rankings for substantial sales revenues, and has garnered considerable power within the academic community.

EJ518247
McGuire, M. D. (1995). Validity Issues for Reputational Studies. *New Directions for Institutional Research; 88*, 45-59.
It is argued that research testing the reliability and validity of college and university reputational studies should be conducted, a concern not raised by consumers and publishers. Two studies of "America's Best Colleges," published by "U.S. News and World Report," raise questions about the guide's validity and suggest that systematic research and development are overdue.

EJ619320
Hossler, D. (2000, March/April). The Problem with College Rankings. *About Campus; 5*, 1, 20-24.
Explores how college rankings may be having a negative effect on higher education, since something as simple as technical changes in the formula for ranking may vary a college's computer

ranking from year-to-year. Suggests that attention needs to be given to what really matters about the college experience, that is, what students put into their experience.

EJ573825
McDonough, P. M; Antonio, A. L.; Walpole, M.; Pérez, L. X. (1998, October). College Rankings: Democratized Knowledge for Whom? *Research in Higher Education; 39*, 5, 513-37.
A study investigated who uses the "U.S. News and World Report," "Money," and other national magazine rankings of colleges and universities, and what types of freshmen find these rankings useful in choosing a college. It also analyzed the for-profit sector's encroachment into a critical educational arena, college access, and whether the rankings actually democratize college knowledge.

Effects of Rankings

EJ579112
Moll, R. W.; Wright, A. B. (1998, Fall). What College Selectivity Looks Like to the Public. *Journal of College Admission; 161*, 12-23.
Discusses the effect of the media's trend to emphasize a few selective colleges with high tuition costs and its effect on other schools. Also discusses ranking colleges and universities. Suggests that the perceptions caused by media hype and rankings may cause the substance of higher education to matter less than the style of the institution.

ED362104
Dennis, E. E., Ed.; LaMay, C. L., Ed. (1993). *Higher Education in the Information Age*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.
This book of 16 author-contributed chapters examines issues of the media and public institutions of higher education including: the media ranking of universities and their contribution to low expectations of universities; the disjunction between massive support for college and university sports events and the intellectual and presumed academic missions of these institutions of higher learning; and boosterism as a general phenomenon in funding. Essays and their authors are: "Mixed (Up) Messages: Universities and the Media" (John F. Burness); "Social Knowledge and Market Knowledge" (Howard Buchbinder and Janice Newson); "Acquiring an Alma Mater or Achieving an Education" (Thomas W. Bergmann); "Gumshoes at the Gates" (Richard M. Cyert); "The 'Ivy Leaguers'" (Lawrence C. Soley); "Scholarship in the Public Interest: Notes from a Soundbite" (Richard W. Bulliet); "Publicize or Perish" (Trudi Spigel); "College Sports Inc." (Murray Sperber); "Grub Street in the Groves of Academe" (Ceil Cleveland); "The Best Campus Dailies" (Jacki Hampton); "Journalism Education: Is There a More Meaningful 'There' There?" (Douglas Birkhead); "The World at Our Fingertips" (Merrily E. Taylor); "The Silicon Scholar" (William H. Graves); "How Free Is Higher Education?" (Howard Zinn); "The Tyranny of Virtue" (Roger Kimball); and "The Academy and Its Discontents" (James W. Carey).

EJ543089
Strosnider, K. (1997, April 4). Study Measures Influence of College Rankings. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 43, 30, A34.
This study found that students who use college rankings are more likely to earn top grades, come from wealthy families, and be Asian-American than any other ethnic group. The survey (n=221,897 students at 432 colleges) found that only 11% of respondents saw rankings as a very important factor in college choice; 60% found them "not at all" important.

Alternatives to Rankings

ED343507
Bogue, E. G., & Saunders, R. L. (1992). *The Evidence for Quality*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
This book offers a synthesis of practices and policies in collegiate quality assurance, examining a range of contemporary approaches that include accreditation, student feedback, professional licensure, college rankings and ratings, and other measures of academic quality. A quality assurance model is offered that links principles of good practice to a strategic unifying vision of quality. The strengths and weaknesses of each approach are evaluated as well as how each makes a contribution to academic decision making. Examples are provided from various colleges and universities to demonstrate how various institutions developed strategic and effective quality assurance programs. In addition, guidelines are given for all educators who wish to develop a superior program of quality assurance that is as unique as their individual campuses. Chapters include background information on collegiate quality and how it is defined and measured; the role of state agencies in both quality assurance and quality enhancement; and an examination of the ethical, economic, and educational factors affecting the leadership climate in higher education today. Contains 308 references and an index.

EJ518248
Machung, A. (1995). Managing the Information Overload: The Case for a Standard Survey Response. *New Directions for Institutional Research; 88*, 61-72.
Response of colleges and universities to surveys from publishers of college guides and popular newsstand magazines is discussed, and considerations in developing a standard survey response are explored. These include the advantages and limitations of standardized information formats, how much of the information reaches prospective students, how much is useful information, publisher response, handling specialized requests, and handling rankings.

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